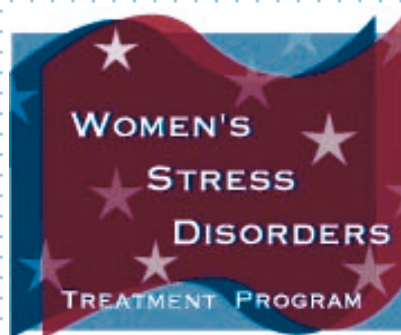


Improving this Moment



Some practical ideas



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What do you mean by that?

- ◆ This is akin to the “courage to change the things I can” part of the serenity prayer. It assumes you are willing to try doing things differently.
- ◆ There are a number of ways to do this.



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Such as?

- ◆ Imagery.
- ◆ When you are physically safe, but feel overwhelmed emotionally (for example, if you are triggered by a reminder of a past stress) imagery can be a helpful way to improve the moment.
- ◆ If you are doing a difficult thing that serves your larger goals (going to an interview despite feeling nervous), imagery can make the moment better.



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What's imagery?

- It's a way to use your experiences and imagination to soothe yourself.
- It makes it possible to feel more comfortable in the midst of uncomfortable situations.
- For example, you might imagine strolling in a sunny meadow, seeing the grasses gently swaying, hearing the birds, smelling spring in the air.



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I'm not sure I could do that when I feel stressed.

- ◆ That's why you need to practice it beforehand.
- ◆ Like getting ready for a job interview, practicing this when you are not under stress will improve your ability to access and use this when you need it.



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***What else could I do
to make it better in
the moment?***

- Finding or making meaning is something many people find useful in stressful moments.
- For example, some people find that their emotional suffering has made them more compassionate towards others or more protective of vulnerable people.
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving was formed as a way to create meaning out of suffering.



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***Are there more ways
to improve this
moment?***

- ◆ Yes, a few more.
- ◆ Another way is to create the opposite feeling in yourself.



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How would I do that?

- The first step is recognizing the feeling you are having in the moment (not always as easy as it sounds).
- Then decide what would be the opposite feeling or a very different feeling.
- Finally, “act as if” you feel that way.



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How could I act in a way I don't feel?

- ◆ Good question.
- ◆ To be able to “act as if” you need to first be *willing* to try to feel something different.
- ◆ Each of us has a particular way we “do” any feeling.



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For example?

A common way to act if you feel depressed is to make your home very dark, to slump over in your chair, to not answer your friends' phone calls, to listen to sad music and to eat junk food or to eat nothing at all.



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***So, what could I do
instead?***

To get a different feeling, you might open the blinds, put on energizing music, take a walk, make yourself smile, sit up straight, or eat healthy food.



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But isn't that being untrue to myself?

- Only if you use it as a way to forever ignore particular feelings or as a way to punish yourself.
- Remember, this is a short-term, crisis management skill, not a long-term solution.
- This skill can help you get closer to meeting your big goals by putting momentary urges and feelings in perspective.



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Can you give me an example of how to change my feelings?

- ◆ Sure. If you're angry at someone you can choose to cultivate the opposite feeling, say compassion.
- ◆ For example, if someone cuts you off in traffic you choose to feel more kindly towards the driver by telling yourself that the driver's daughter probably fell off the jungle gym at school and the driver is rushing to be with her daughter.



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But what if that's not true?

- ◆ We want to help you focus on what is *effective*. Sometimes assuming positive motives when people make mistakes is an effective way of reducing the suffering that being angry causes you.
- ◆ If you use this approach , do it because you've determined it's the best choice in that moment, not because someone told you anger is wrong, or because they are uncomfortable with your anger.



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But my partner always makes me angry. I can't do this every time

- If you are consistently angry at a particular person in your life, it may be because they keep treating you poorly. It may be appropriate to talk about this with them at a time when you do not feel ruled by your anger.
- We'll talk more about ways to do this in the relationship modules.



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Actually, almost everyone makes me angry

- ◆ In that case, it is probably an issue that is a broader pattern in your relationships.
- ◆ Sometimes anger arises as a reaction to a situation that feels similar to how a past trauma felt. While that is understandable, it is still important to develop other ways to respond.
- ◆ The modules on anger management and on dealing with flashbacks may help.



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***Okay. You're saying
that I should go with
what works?***

- ◆ Go with the best plan for reaching your big goals. All of these skills are options - there is no "right" thing to do, or even the "best" thing in every situation.
- ◆ These are skills to get you through the roughest spots so you can solve problems better and with less misery.



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***You're not saying I
should just snap out of it?***

- ◆ No.
- ◆ What we are saying is that a willingness to act in a way that is different than how you feel in the moment can sometimes loosen the hold of that emotion.
- ◆ Very often our minds decide how we feel based upon how we act. By changing how we act, we can influence how we feel.



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Anything else that can help in the moment?

- Relaxing can be extremely helpful.
- Most people tense up when they experience fear or pain.
- This physical response is the least helpful one in terms of both comfort and safety.
- There are many relaxation training approaches and tapes. Try several and use the one that works for you.



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How else could I improve the moment?

- Practice focusing on just this one moment.
- Our minds are very powerful and tend to group all similar experiences together.
- If these similar experiences are painful this lumping together causes us to suffer unnecessarily.
- Focusing on just this moment in time can reduce the amount you suffer. For more on this, look at the Mindfulness module.



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Any more ideas?

- ◆ Take a time out from adult responsibilities and then allow yourself to enjoy that.
- ◆ Everyone needs time away from obligations. Planning this time away ensures you don't get burned out. By scheduling it you don't create the problems that arise from missing crucial responsibilities at bad times.
- ◆ Don't wait until you can take a week. Even twenty minutes can be helpful.



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What else?

- One more idea. Be on your own team. It sounds simple, but requires lots of practice.
- Sometimes people are their own worst enemies.
- Talk to yourself the way you'd like someone else to talk to you. Cheer yourself on, talk kindly to yourself, celebrate your efforts and accomplishments.



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How do I decide when to use these skills?

- Evaluate the benefits and costs of the different behavioral choices you can make.
- You can make a list of pro's and con's of different ways of responding in a crisis. Every behavior has both useful and problematic, short-term and long-term consequences.



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Do you have an example?

- ◆ Think of the pro's and con's of something you always do to deal with distress, say hiding under your covers.
- ◆ One pro of this might be that you don't have to feel so uncomfortable.
- ◆ A con might be that you miss out on some fun things when you're under the covers.



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***And what would be the
pro's and con's of
the new behavior?***

- Say you chose to use contributing to others as a strategy to ride out the feelings.
- The pro's would be that you might meet some nice people or that you feel proud of yourself.
- The con might be that when you function more effectively, you risk people expecting more of you.



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*Okay, I think I've got
pro's and con's down*

- ◆ Great!
- ◆ You can use that to decide when to use these skills and what skills to use.



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